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C O N F I D E N T I A L MUSCAT 001063

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: Omani "Cyber Rage": Alleged Omani-Israeli Discussions Spark E-Outcry

CLASSIFIED BY: L. Victor Hurtado, CdA, Department of State, Embassy Muscat; REASON: 1.4(D)

¶1. (SBU) During, and immediately following, the fall session of the bi-annual meeting of the Middle East Desalination Research Center (MEDRC) in Muscat, news outlets in Israel and international wire services reported that senior Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials including Director General Yossi Gal and Middle East Director, Yakov Hadas, met with high level Omani government officials including the Minister responsible for Foreign Affairs, Yousef Bin Alawi, and Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al-Bousaidi. The reports cited unnamed Omani and Israeli officials as confirming that the meetings took place with some accounts indicating Omani support for efforts to resume peace talks. To date, there has been no official report from any of Oman's traditional media outlets regarding the meetings or acknowledgement of the participation of an Israeli delegation in the MEDRC meeting.

¶2. (SBU) While Omanis were unable to learn about the visit and possible talks from any of the local print or traditional electronic media, it was the most popular topic for the on-line Omani forum "al Sablah". The forum topic entitled "The Visit of the Israeli Delegation to Oman" generated 167 responses and 5025 hits, easily making it the most widely viewed and discussed item on "al Sablah."

¶3. (SBU) The overwhelming majority of responses to the thread reflect deep disapproval and antagonism toward the visit in addition to the rejection of the notion that Oman would even receive the Israelis. Posters to the forum also expressed distrust of the sources of the news and demanded direct confirmation from the Omani media. Some comments labeled the meeting "treasonous", declared Omani hatred for Israel and the "Zionists" and demanded that the government and media speak out on the issue. Explicit mention of the use of "al Sablah" as a direct line of communication between the people and the government were also characteristic of thread comments.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: While regular contact between Oman and Israel has and will to continue to characterize their bilateral relationship, the issue is highly sensitive and not publicized by the government. While this approach may seek to preclude awareness and stymie public controversy, the lack of open discussion combined with the ease of access to outside sources of information, likely resulted in the amplification of dissenting voices in cyberspace. And while it is clear that the anonymous nature of on-line forums often attract those with extreme views, it is also clear, in this case, that Omani government policy on Israel does not appear to be supported by a significant portion of the public.
Hurtado